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823 104 *tap*. A big open river is generally called *kir e.g.* the Bahr el Jebel and the Sobat but a river may have its proper name, *e.g.* the Bahr el Ghazal is called Naam. Smaller rivers or streams are denoted by the word *yir*. A marshy depression inland is called *wang* and a big lagoon running out of one of one of the main rivers is called *bar*. A marshy depression running parallel to a river bank is called *tor*. *Toc* are extensive swamps which form the flood plains of rivers.

VIII

311 From my description of their country it will be seen that the Nuer are faced with problems which daunt men better equipped than them. For they are so poor that they have little but their courage and their knowledge to master a harsh environment. Nuer have to consider how to protect and pasture their cattle and also how to grow maize and millet, for they practise both cattle husbandry and hoe-culture and have to take the requirements of both into account. As gardeners their difficulties only arise in the rains for in the dry season nothing will grow in the waterless wastes. As herdsmen there are problems to be solved at all seasons. Gardening will be described later. Here we may consider how Nuer ensure the welfare of their herds by adapting their life to the seasons.

233 361 •243 Excess or insufficiency of water is their first problem. It is essential that men and cattle should be protected from the water which covers most of the country in the rains. Cattle get diseases of the hooves and die if they have to stand in water. Protection is given to man and beast by building huts and byres on higher ground. In selecting a village site two considerations must be borne in mind. Firstly there must be a sloping ridge off which rain-water can run to the plain below and this ridge must be broad enough to allow huts and byres to be built and for the cattle to be tethered in the kraals outside the byres. Preferably it should also be broad and long enough to allow the flocks and herds to pasture without having to descend into the inundated plains to graze among the tall rank grasses. Secondly there must be land on one side of the ridge suitable for cultivation, *i.e.*, land which will retain sufficient water for the millet to grow

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but not enough to drown it altogether. The ideal arrangement, which I have often observed among the Western Nuer, is to build on the edge of a whale-backed ridge with the huts and byres facing the broad back of the ridge. This ensures that the cattle will have dry kraals and also permits them to graze on the short grasses of the ridge. At the back of the huts and byres on slightly lower ground are the gardens. These must be on lower ground because the ridge itself is usually sandy and, where occupied, has a hard trodden floor of ashes and debris and is therefore unsuitable for cultivation of millet. They must also be at the back of the huts and byres so that the cattle can move freely to and from their kraals without invading the standing millet. To prevent this happening people erect a thornwood fence between the kraals and the gardens and extend it along both sides of the kraal, so that only the side opening on to the ridge is left unfenced. In Western Nuerland I have seen low mud dykes erected between the flooded plain and the approach to the ridge. These are to prevent the water encroaching too far in years of high flood.

I have sometimes wondered why Nuer so often build their villages on shadeless ridges in the middle of a treeless plain when it would be possible to build in some of the stretches of thornwood or palm forest that one finds here and there in their country. I have often noticed villages built in the open when shady spots are to be found a few hundred yards away. But Nuer can give good reasons for keeping to their dreary sites exposed to the fierce tropical sun and the bitter north wind. In the open their animals are safer from wild beasts; they are less worried by insect pests, and their kraals soon dry after rain. It would appear also that thornwood forest is less suitable for cultivation of millet than more open country. Nevertheless Nuer sometimes build in open forest. I have seen forest villages in parts of Lou and Eastern Gaajok country. The Eastern Gaajok villages, which I have not visited, are mainly in forest country.

Most of these ridges and knolls have probably been occupied for a very long period of time, perhaps long before the Nuer lived in their present home. In digging graves Nuer have found pots and cooking

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361 stones and remains of fires. They have been occupied by many
172 generations of Nuer. Families are not, however, bound to any particular piece of ground, and move freely when the ground is exhausted and no longer yields a good harvest of millet or rich pasturage for
361 the cattle. A whole village may then move and live elsewhere for some years but sooner or later they will settle there again for it is their birth place. Families and groups of kinsmen will leave a village if there are many deaths, if the cattle are poorly (*be ran gien kä kwi
[B42] nieth, kä kwi ghok*), or if fights have taken place in the village. Byres and huts generally last about five years and have then to be rebuilt.
• [243 Gardens are cultivated for as long as ten successive years before they
233] are finally exhausted. When cattle and sheep and goats have grazed on village pastures (*dor*) for about the same length of time the grasses show evident signs of exhaustion. Thus in 1936 the people of Nyueny pointed out to me that after about nine years of occupation their village pastures had been overgrazed and were poor in consequence.

423 Village sites are owned by certain clans and sections of clans.
602 However, ownership is mainly a matter of sentiment, based on long association between a ridge and a lineage, and since the country is not over-populated and the Nuer do not make very extensive cultivations it never becomes a legal issue. Anyone may settle in a village and the villagers will show him where he may build his huts and byre and cultivate his millet. This practically means that he may build and cultivate anywhere not already in occupation or under *cultivation. Nuer are very generous in such matters. In fact*, however, a man is unlikely to settle in a village unless he can claim kinship with some of the villagers, *i.e.*, is genealogically attached to the dominant lineage there. *Mar*, kinship, can generally be discovered somewhere and consequently it is usually possible to place all the occupants of a village on a single genealogical chart. There are no real problems of ownership of land among the Nuer.

361 Some parts of Nuerland are blessed with better village sites than others. Lou country is exceptionally well favoured in this respect though Western Nuerland has many fine ridges. Lou people say that in a year of *nyuor*, or high river-flood, their ridges remain dry

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262 are dura, corn, mutton, beef, the flesh of some wild animals—antelope, gazelle, waterbuck—guinea fowl, fish, crocodile—which is considered a choice food—beans, milk, and sometimes greens. This does not mean that these foods are constantly at hand. The average diet of a Nuer consists of dura, fish, milk, and occasionally meat. This limitation of diet works the greatest hardship for little children and the sick and aged.

A Nuer seldom kills a cow unless one has to be offered as a sacrifice. Sheep are not often primarily killed for food. Wild animals are not often available for they usually must be killed with a gun—and who has a gun? Even guinea fowl are not easily caught.

A Nuer will, generally speaking, not eat wild duck. Eggs are not eaten by men as they are considered effeminate. Milk is likewise not regarded as food for men, but women and children and sick men may drink it. Women refuse [941] to drink milk during their menstrual periods.

243 The staple article of food is dura, or kaffir corn as we call it. The dura is planted in May, providing the early rains have begun. If the rainy season is late the planting is delayed until the ground has been softened by several rains so that hoeing is possible. Small hand-hoes are used. Everybody hoes—men, women, and children each do their part in getting the field ready to be planted. The seed dura, which has been kept over from the past year, is sown. It requires to be hoed several times during the season, for the frequent rains make weeds grow as well as dura. In late September or early October, according to the time of planting, the dura is ready to be cut.

[791] When harvest time approaches a 'guk kwoth' or 'prophet of god' is consulted as to when they may cut their dura, and his advice is heeded.

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Every one helps in the work of the harvest, for the 243
stalks must be cut down and the heads cut off and placed
upon a rack which has been placed in the yard for that
purpose. The grains of dura are pounded out, then it [422]
becomes the property of the housewife after the seed dura
has been selected and stored for the coming year.

The stalks of dura are often kept for fuel or for making [372]
fences.

If the rainy season has started early there may be a
second crop of dura, but this seldom happens.

The wife must pound the dura and sift it to get the 252
bran out. She pounds it in a hole in the ground which she
has plastered with mud, using a long pole. She usually
chants a song as she pounds, the thud of the pounding
serving as a low accompaniment to her song.

The dura is cooked like mush and forms the main part
of the food of a Nuer. He eats it without salt or sugar;
sometimes he has a little milk on it. Or the dura may be
soaked and then allowed to sour a little, and then cooked,
in order to give the family a little variety in their
meals.

Corn is also eaten, usually being parched. They also 262
chew the dura stalk or the sugar-cane stalk (if they have
it) for the sugar they find in them.

Some wild tubers are eaten, and some kinds of wild
greens. Beans are also eaten, but I know of no Nuer who
plants them in his own village. Men consider these wild
greens effeminate and will not eat them except in times of
famine. Sometimes in times of famine they gather certain [268]
wild-grass seeds and cook them as a food.

The Nuer is not inclined to plant any large field and 262
thus be accused of a surplus of food. The Arab merchant 437
comes to his village when the dura is threshed and shows
such an array of beads and cloths that the Nuer is tempted